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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C

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SUBJECT: AJELLO VISIT TO RWANDAN DEMOBILIZATION CENTER

REF: KIGALI 004

Sensitive but UNCLASS. Please Protect Accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary. On 17 March Ambassador Aldo Ajello, EU Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, visited Mutobo Demobilization and Reintegration Center. Poloff accompanied the EU delegation to a special site visit set up by the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) to introduce Ajello to a group of ex-combatants who reportedly recently returned from the DRC. Ajello heard directly from former Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) combatants that their two biggest issues are leaving behind dependents in eastern Congo and making the difficult journey to Rwanda despite impediments by the FARDC and MONUC. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The event was attended by the European Commission Head of Mission, the French, British and Ugandan Ambassadors, political officers from the Dutch, Belgian and Burundian Embassies and representatives from MONUC, the World Bank and the Rwandan press corps. Jean Sayinzoga, Chairman of the RDRC, gave Ajello a briefing and a short tour of the center. The Ajello delegation then met with a group of approximately 120 ex-combatants waiting for the start of the next training phase.

¶3. (U) Ajello listened to three ex-FDLR combatants from the group describe their experiences leaving eastern DRC (Note. A volunteer from the group acted as interpreter for Ajello translating between Kinyarwanda and French. End note.). The group of men ranged from 18 years old to the mid-40s and seemed to be in good health. They described similar difficulties getting to Rwanda including: leaving behind families, avoiding Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) units for fear of capture, and capitulating to MONUC. When Ajello asked the group as a whole who had left wives and children in the DRC over half raised their hands. Ajello praised the group for their willingness to return, encouraged them to successfully reintegrate into their communities and pledged that the international community would continue to work to improve the security situation in eastern Congo.

¶4. (SBU) Comment. What was originally planned as an unofficial visit of the 'comite de suivi' ('follow-up committee') by the British Ambassador devolved into a standard Mutobo visit complete with ex-combatant testimony (and dancing), and a speech to the returnees and press. There were no surprises, the two primary and familiar complaints from the ex-combatants were the need to leave behind family and the accusations of incompetence and worse directed at MONUC and the FARDC. While Ambassador Ajello probably did not learn anything new, he likely benefited, as all visitors do, from seeing firsthand the center and the successful demobilization and reintegration program the GOR has in place for returning ex-combatants (reftel).

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